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Caught between the ACP and the AU: Africa's relations with the European Union in a post-Cotonou Agreement context

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Abstract: This article traces the formation of Africa's position in view of the negotiations with the European Union for a successor to the Cotonou Agreement set to expire in February 2020, providing some explanations for the failure of the ACP Group and the African Union to achieve a consolidated position. By examining official discourses and the role of different actors, it demonstrates that the ACP Group and the AU manifested alternative views on the EU-ACP cooperation model and on the part that each wished to play in the negotiation and implementation of the future agreement. Moreover, it shows how, in spite of previous frictions, the ACP Secretariat and ACP Committee of Ambassadors on the one hand and the AU Commission and the AU Permanent Representatives Committee on the other hand formed two separate common fronts to defend their territories and preserve (or increase) their role as the EU's legitimate interlocutors.

Keywords: ACP Group, Cotonou Agreement, post-Cotonou, African Union, EU-ACP relations, EU-AU relations, Joint Africa-EU Partnership

Introduction

On 30 May 2018, the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) Group of States adopted a negotiating mandate for the successor to the Cotonou Agreement, which has governed its relations with the European Union (EU) since June 2000.¹ This document proposed to maintain the integrity of the ACP Group and contained a series of guiding principles for the upcoming negotiations, but failed to take account of the intensification of regional integration dynamics and the increased prominence of regional organisations. This choice was contentious, not least because, on 19 March 2018, the African Union (AU) had adopted a decision indicating its intention to use the post-Cotonou process to conclude a completely new framework for cooperation with the EU on a Union-to-Union, continent-to-continent basis, 'outside the ACP context'.² The AU's pronouncement, which was also divisive, did not attract much public attention – probably because on the same day the African Continental Free Trade

Area (AfCFTA) was signed by 44 countries – but generated apprehension in diplomatic circles in Brussels.

This article asks why the ACP Group, which includes 48 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (as well as 16 in the Caribbean and 15 in the Pacific), and the African Union, which consists of all countries in Africa including the 48 members of the ACP Group, took two positions that seemed difficult to reconcile. To explain this conundrum, it examines official discourses and unravels the role played by the key organs of the two organisations. In particular, it traces the process in both contexts through analysis of published and unpublished documents and drawing on semi-structured interviews with 18 senior policy makers of the ACP Secretariat, the African Union Commission, and several African ambassadors between March and May 2018. Ultimately, it demonstrates that the ACP Group and the AU projected alternative views on the EU-ACP cooperation model (and, consequently, on the nature of their partnership with the EU) and on the part that they wished to play in the negotiation and implementation of the future agreement. Moreover, it shows how, in spite of previous frictions, the ACP Secretariat and ACP Committee of Ambassadors (CoA), on the one hand, and the AU Commission (AUC) and the AU Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC), on the other hand, formed two separate common fronts to defend their territories and preserve (or increase) their role as the EU's legitimate interlocutors in the attempt to best represent the interests of Africa's people. Before delving into the two processes, Africa's variegated relations with the EU are sketched and the EU's negotiating directives for a post-Cotonou Agreement briefly presented.

Africa's relations with the European Union

Africa engages with Europe in a number of different configurations, ranging from bilateral to continental through regional and ad-hoc formats.

Bilateral relations mostly concern conventional matters like development cooperation, economic development, and political dialogue. The main legal framework is the Cotonou Agreement, an association agreement that governs relations between the European Union and 79 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. South Africa is a full member of the ACP Group but a qualified member of the Cotonou Agreement, as its relations with the EU are also regulated by a separate Trade, Development and Co-operation Agreement (TDCA) signed in 2004 and the Strategic Partnership signed in 2007.³ Countries in North Africa interact with the EU mostly in the context of the European Neighbourhood

Policy (ENP), having signed bilateral association agreements (AAs) in the mid-2000s. The logic underpinning these three arrangements is different: historically, generous aid packages and preferential trade regimes have characterised the EU-ACP partnership; promotion of shared interests and cooperation on regional and global issues are at the heart of EU-South Africa relations; security, investment opportunities and cultural dialogue are promoted through the AAs.

A second important track refers to the continent-to-continent dimension developed over the years via a series of summits that include countries both north and south of the Sahara. This process started in Cairo in April 2000 and culminated in the adoption of the Joint-Africa EU Partnership (JAES) in Lisbon in December 2007, with subsequent implementation plans agreed upon every three years. The launch of the JAES was saluted as a step towards more symmetrical relations and an implicit recognition of the increased prominence of the African Union. These high expectations, however, were met only in part: policy dialogue intensified with the creation of new, yet often cumbersome, institutional frameworks, and with a large number of meetings and technical activities often seen as indication of success. An exception to this unsatisfactory state of affairs is the partnership on peace and security, which has been supported through the African Peace Facility (APF). Paradoxically, the implementation of the JAES, and particularly the APF, has relied on resources drawn from the European Development Fund (EDF), which is an extra-budget instrument created to support only ACP countries and regions.⁴

Other formats for Africa's engagement with the EU involve the regional level. In particular, various regional economic communities (REC) have, more or less formal, relations with the EU, characterised by the EU influencing these organisations through the provision of funds and capacity building – particularly in the area of peace and security. In some instances, the RECs coincide with the regions that have negotiated and signed the economic partnership agreements (EPA), which means that trade relations, for the most part, are no longer covered under the EU-ACP framework – nor does trade cooperation with the EU fall within the remit of the AU, though with the signing of the AfCFTA some changes may be expected in the future. Interestingly, the 1975 Georgetown Agreement, which marked the birth of the ACP Group, created four regions in Africa: Central Africa, West Africa, East Africa, and Southern Africa.⁵ Ad-hoc interaction between European and African actors takes place on security-related issues, for instance in the case of the G5 Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger), and in the area of migration, with policy dialogues with countries

along the western migratory route (Rabat Process) and the eastern migratory route (Khartoum Process), as well as in the context of the 2015 Valletta Summit with a selected number of European and African countries.⁶

The expiration of the Cotonou Agreement in February 2020 – together with the fact that the JAES was in need of a comprehensive review to take account of the numerous changes that had occurred on both continents since 2007 – provided an opportunity to address overlaps between all these policy and legal frameworks and rethink relations between the EU and Africa more generally. If the performance of the JAES was disappointing at best, the existence and added value of the ACP Group was questioned by many, certainly owing to changing regionalisation dynamics but also to the patchy implementation record of the Cotonou Agreement in the areas of economic development and political dialogue.⁷

Taking all of these factors into account, the European Commission, following an intense preparatory process,⁸ proposed to build on the strengths of its long-standing cooperation with ACP countries, while allowing for a more regionally tailored approach. More specifically, its plan was to conclude a single agreement, but articulated into an 'umbrella' with all ACP countries and three regional 'compacts'. The umbrella would list shared principles, spell out strategic objectives and establish mechanisms to facilitate cooperation in international settings. The three regional compacts would become the new centre of gravity for action, with region-specific priorities and governance mechanisms. With a view to promoting an 'Africa as one' approach, the possibility of opening the revised EU-ACP Agreement to 'the involvement or adhesion' of countries in North Africa was also foreseen. Notably, the expectation was that the three regional compacts would 'replace and upgrade' the existing regional strategies with Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, thus including the JAES.⁹ This vision – endorsed in the negotiating directives adopted by the EU Council of Ministers in June 2018 – had an impact on how the ACP Group as well as the AU were preparing for the upcoming negotiations.

Tracing Africa's preparations for a post-Cotonou cooperation framework

The preparations for the post-Cotonou Agreement led by the ACP Group were intertwined with a broader discussion on EU-Africa relations launched by the AU. Importantly, the 1975 Georgetown Agreement entrusted the ACP Group and its organs to exclusively manage the EU-ACP partnership. The Cotonou Agreement does recognise the importance of regional integration, but it was only with the 2010 revision that the AU was officially included among

the actors of cooperation. However, this acknowledgement did not result in a more active participation of the AU in the governance of the EU-ACP partnership. By contrast, the AU has been the EU's key interlocutor in the five EU-Africa summits held since 2000 – renamed AU-EU Summit on the occasion of the fifth one held in Abidjan in November 2017 following Morocco's (re-)accession to the AU in January 2017 – as well as in the implementation of the JAES. When the possibility that the JAES could be subsumed under a revised EU-ACP Agreement emerged, the AU and its organs sought a more direct involvement in the post-Cotonou discussions, seen as an opportunity to push forward the AU integration plans, particularly after the adoption of their long term strategic vision for the next 50 years, known as *Agenda 2063*.¹⁰

The ACP negotiating mandate: from Malabo to Lomé

The ACP started its reflection on the post-Cotonou framework with the establishment of the ‘Ambassadorial Working Group on Future Perspectives’ in November 2010, which was chaired by Guyana’s Ambassador Patrick Gomes, appointed Secretary General of the ACP Group in December 2014 for a five-year term.¹¹ The report of the Ambassadorial Group called for the repositioning and transformation of the ACP Group, including the possibility of acting as a hub of South-South and triangular cooperation, and the creation of structured relations with the RECs and other regional organisations; it also urged ACP countries to ensure the financial sustainability of the ACP Group so as to reduce its dependence on the EU and to agree on measures to strengthen the role of the ACP Secretariat and the Committee of Ambassadors.¹² In parallel, an ‘Eminent Persons Group’, chaired by former President of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo, invited the ACP Group to capitalise on its status as a tri-continental organisation by playing a more visible role in the international arena and to remain united with a view to crafting a more balanced partnership post-2020 with the EU. It also concluded that, to be considered a relevant and influential player on the international stage, the ACP Group should streamline its tasks and concentrate where it has an added value. In this regard, it proposed a focus on three key areas: trade and investment, political dialogue and advocacy, and development cooperation.¹³

Two milestones in the preparation of the ACP negotiating mandate were the ACP summits held in Equatorial Guinea in December 2012 and in Papua New Guinea in May-June 2016. At the 2012 Summit in Malabo, the ACP Heads of State and Government adopted the *Sipopo Declaration*, through which they reaffirmed their 'determination to stay united as a Group' and

committed to 'deepening and enhancing the ACP-EU relationship ... through a new and mutually beneficial partnership agreement after 2020'. Moreover, in light of 'the demands for fundamental renewal and transformation' seen as 'unavoidable imperatives for strategic change', they stressed the importance of a strong ACP Group, certainly in relation to the EU, but also in view of 'developing diversified South-South and other partnerships'.¹⁴ At the 2016 Summit in Port Moresby, the ACP Heads of State and Government adopted the *Waigani Communiqué*, through which they expressed their determination to 'reposition the ACP Group' so as to ensure that it 'plays a more influential role in global governance with a view to fulfilling the legitimate aspirations of our peoples'. Moreover, they reiterated their intention to 'renew and enhance the ACP-EU partnership with a legally binding agreement building on the Cotonou acquis'.¹⁵

The core principles and the framework to guide the negotiations with the EU were subsequently outlined by the ACP Council of Ministers and Committee of Ambassadors. The ACP Council of Ministers of November 2016 took some crucial decisions on the process and the proposed content of the future EU-ACP Agreement. It identified three strategic pillars – trade, investment, industrialisation and services; development cooperation, technology, science and innovation/research; political dialogue and advocacy – and tasked the CoA to commence work on the structure and arrangements for the future negotiations.¹⁶ The CoA, in turn, produced a position paper, *Towards the ACP we want*, which spelt out specific priorities within each of the three strategic pillars, but failed to clarify the role of regional and continental bodies, the intention being that of preserving the existing ACP geographical structure based on six regions, four of which are in Africa.¹⁷ This position paper was endorsed by the ACP Council of Ministers of May 2017, which also defined the guiding principles for the negotiations: negotiating as one block, preserving the single undertaking approach, securing a legally binding agreement, and maintaining the acquis of the Cotonou Agreement.¹⁸ In response to the negotiating directives proposed by the European Commission, the ACP Council of Ministers of December 2017 invited the CoA to 'engage with regional and continental organisations to take account of regional specificities in the negotiation process'.¹⁹

The ACP negotiating mandate was officially adopted by the ACP Council of Ministers in Lomé at the end of May 2018.²⁰ It confirmed the three strategic pillars and the guiding principles for the negotiations as previously agreed upon, adding also a long list of cross-cutting themes (capacity building; vulnerability and resilience-building, oceans and seas;

climate change; gender equality; health; youth and demographic dividend; culture and development; peace, security and democracy). It placed significant emphasis on the existence of the European Development Fund, or the creation of a new multiannual financial mechanism, with adequate resources available to all ACP states, including middle-income countries (MICs), and on the preservation of intra-ACP cooperation, thus guaranteeing a significant role for both the CoA and the ACP Secretariat. Finally, it reaffirmed that the EU and its member states on the one hand and the ACP states on the other hand should be the sole parties to the agreement, though it conceded that 'consideration may be given to other actors playing a significant role in implementation of the new Agreement'.²¹

The AU and the African Common Position

The discussion of the post-Cotonou framework in the AU context commenced with a seminar organised by the AU Commission in Addis Ababa in December 2015. In that context, the AUC called on the AU to develop a position by 2017 at the latest deciding on whether: the Cotonou Agreement, which excludes countries in North Africa, fits the AU's ambitions enshrined in *Agenda 2063*; the EU-ACP framework is still relevant for organising cooperation with the EU beyond donor-recipient dynamics; the JAES and the EU-ACP Agreement are complementary or alternative frameworks; the ACP Group is the most appropriate platform to promote Africa's interests.²² Clearly, the tone of these requests gives a sense of the sceptical approach of the AUC towards the EU-ACP framework as well as regarding the relevance of the ACP Group.

A preliminary discussion on the post-Cotonou process took place at the AU Executive Council of January 2017, as part of a general evaluation of Africa's strategic partnerships with various international actors (namely, Arab countries, China, India, Korea, Japan, South American countries, and Turkey). The AU Executive Council mandated the PRC – in collaboration with the AUC, relevant AU Organs, the RECs and African experts and working closely with the African Group of Ambassadors in Brussels – to prepare an African common position before the July 2017 AU Summit.²³ Not much progress must have been made if the AU Executive Council of July 2017 reiterated the same request to the PRC, now with a new deadline: the AU-EU Summit of November 2017. Some clashes on the possible consequences of the post-Cotonou process, however, started to emerge, particularly with countries in North Africa, which is reflected in the inclusion of the following clause: 'bearing in mind the obligations that some Member States have with the EU'²⁴ – note that, as mentioned above, the

EU had manifested its intention to 'involve' North African countries in a future agreement with ACP countries.²⁵

Surprisingly, the post-Cotonou process did not figure on the agenda of the November 2017 EU-AU Summit in Abidjan. The European Commission, facing significant resistance from some EU Member States, was finalising its proposal, foreseeing three regional 'compacts' (one of which was with Africa) complemented by an 'umbrella' for all ACP countries. Similarly, the AU was not yet ready to spell out its position. Evidently, both parties seemed to have 'a strong priority to avoid controversy at all cost in the Abidjan summit'.²⁶ This choice, however, was more puzzling for the AU, particularly because the ACP Group meanwhile had made significant progress in articulating its vision (leaving little space, if any, to the AU). Some observers have noted that, 'because of a lack of strategic vision, and problems of internal cohesion and capacity, the African regional bodies seem[ed] to “submit” themselves to an ACP-EU "umbrella" in a partnership of the past that lacks legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness'.²⁷ Meanwhile, an AU Executive Council of October 2017 had decided to set up a 'Taskforce on Post 2020 Cotonou Agreement', with the aim of speeding up the completion of the African common position before the January 2018 AU Summit. The AU Taskforce was confronted with 'various logistical problems' and, more importantly, with diverging views on the substance of the decision, which resulted in further postponement: the AU Executive Council of January 2018, once again, invited the PRC to accelerate work and submit a draft text within two months.²⁸

The African common position was adopted on 19 March 2018 in the context of an extraordinary session of the AU Executive Council.²⁹ Even though all attention was on the adoption of the momentous African Continental Free Trade Area, the agenda was 'broadened to include this issue because of its relevance and the urgent need for the African side to have its negotiating tool, like the European Union, the Caribbean and the Pacific, which are already up to date in their position', as the Chairperson of the AUC Moussa Faki Mahamat put it.³⁰ The content of the decision was brief but clear: first, Africa is united and eager to speak with one voice; second, the new cooperation agreement with the EU should be a continent-to-continent partnership with the AU and *Agenda 2063* at its heart and should be separated from the ACP context; third, all existing arrangements between states or regions of the AU and the EU should be preserved; fourth, new agreements underpinned by South-South dynamics should be initiated with countries in the Caribbean and the Pacific. In terms of thematic priorities, the African common position did not substantially differ from the ACP negotiating

mandate: structural transformation of economies and inclusive growth; people-centred development; migration and mobility; peace and security; science, technology and innovation; environment and climate change; governance, human rights and natural resource management. Importantly, the AU Executive Council entrusted the PRC, with the assistance of the AUC, to oversee the negotiation process with the EU and regularly report to the AU Executive Council itself.

The adoption of the African common position was celebrated as 'the first step towards a win-win discussion with the European Union',³¹ but it was far from being consensual. The process was led by pro-AU states such as Rwanda, Chad and, to a degree, South Africa, which together with the AU Commission vociferously questioned the added value of the ACP Group. Significant resistance, conversely, came from most countries in West Africa, particularly Senegal and Burkina Faso, as well as many in East Africa, such as Uganda and Kenya, which held a more positive view of the EU-ACP partnership; in between, countries in North Africa were wary of the potential implications of the AU decision for their privileged relations with the EU, but were reassured by the inclusion into the final text of a clause pointing to the preservation of their existing arrangements with the EU.³² These divisions were reflected in the unusual language used: the AU Executive Council did adopt the African common position, nevertheless it allowed regions to send comments so that the AU Taskforce could finalise it in view of an official presentation at the ACP Council of Ministers in Lomé at the end of May 2018.³³

Following the circulation of a revised version in mid-May 2018, the general lines of the African common position were presented in Lomé, but only in the context of a side-event organised for all regional organisations. The AU, not being a member of the ACP Group, was denied the floor at the ACP Council of Ministers meeting, which in fact adopted a mandate for a renewed EU-ACP partnership agreement, this time with unlimited duration, thus ignoring the African common position adopted in Kigali only two months earlier.³⁴

The ACP, the AU and Africa's relations with the EU

The analysis of the processes that led to the adoption of the ACP negotiating mandate and the AU's African common position, as discussed in the previous section, has pointed to the existence of two camps: those, within the ACP Group, who wish to preserve the EU-ACP cooperation model, and those, within AU circles, who believe that the AU is Africa's only

legitimate interlocutor with the EU. This section, by examining official discourses and the role played by key actors, seeks to provide some keys to explaining the divide between the ACP Group and the AU, which albeit led by two more or less active secretariats, largely overlap in terms of membership: the same 48 African countries belong to both the ACP Group and the AU.

Diverging discourses

The first contentious issue, in terms of official discourses, concerns the achievements of the EU-ACP cooperation framework. Within the ACP Group, the verdict is overwhelmingly positive, ranging from characterising the relationship 'as a unique North-South Development Cooperation model' (2012 *Sipopo Declaration*)³⁵ to recognising 'the effective contribution that the long-standing partnership with the European Union has made to the development of ACP States' (2016 *Waigani Communiqué*);³⁶ from stating that the 'special historical relationship remains today unequalled in its nature and scope' (2017 ACP position paper)³⁷ to acknowledging the need to 'maintain and build on the acquis of the Cotonou Agreement' (2018 ACP negotiating mandate).³⁸

Within AU circles, a more critical view has been advanced, portraying the EU-ACP partnership as a traditional North-South, donor-recipient cooperation framework, 'which has not made a real difference in practice'.³⁹ In this vein, a senior policymaker within the AUC has claimed that the Cotonou Agreement has done little to 'enable Africa to position itself firmly on the path to strong and inclusive growth and sustainable development' and may even have aggravated the situation for some countries, 'plunging an important part of African peoples into extreme poverty'.⁴⁰

The second point of divergence between the two camps relates to the status of the EU-AU partnership. Within the ACP Group, opinions appear somehow fluid: some wish 'to see the African Union-European Union partnership consolidated in the frame of a new post-Cotonou Agreement', which would continue being driven by member states;⁴¹ others have cautioned against the supranational ambitions of the AU and its capacity to effectively lead towards (what should become) a mature continent-to-continent relationship.⁴² Interestingly, the 2017 ACP position paper warned about the potential overlaps between the EU-ACP and other policy frameworks, pointing to 'the importance of applying scrupulously the principle of subsidiarity',⁴³ whereas the 2018 ACP negotiating mandate listed the promotion of regional

integration as one of the strategic objectives to pursue, whilst 'maintaining the geographical and geopolitical character of the ACP Group'.⁴⁴

Within AU circles, the possibility that the JAES could be subsumed under the EU-ACP framework, as per the proposal of the European Union, generated some preoccupation in a few African capitals.⁴⁵ In their view, the EU-ACP Agreement has contributed to fragmenting Africa, weakening and slowing down the pace of the integration process, and more generally undermining its political, social and economic interests.⁴⁶ Thus, as put by the AUC's Department for Economic Affairs, 'it does not make sense to accommodate existing pan-African and regional dynamics under an ACP umbrella framework. Rather would it be desirable to reverse this logic by starting from the regional dynamics in Africa'.⁴⁷ It is therefore not surprising that the JAES is seen as a genuine political partnership breaking donor-recipient dynamics, based on the respect of African unity and the promotion of continent-to-continent dialogue. The negotiations of the post-Cotonou Agreement, in this logic, could provide a crucial opportunity to inject the continental dimension into the bilateral relations between the EU and African countries.⁴⁸

The third divide is in relation to who would best articulate and defend Africa's interests in the negotiations with the EU. Within the ACP Group, the shared view is that the ACP membership 'has secured benefits for the countries in their international engagement in specific areas that are more favourable than the outcomes they could have expected from purely national action or via regional or other configurations of states'.⁴⁹ The key strength of the ACP Group, historically, has been that of representing a block resting on solidarity between its members – though it should be noted that in the negotiation of the Cotonou Agreement it managed to use 'numbers as leverage' only to a minimal degree. The risks of potentially asymmetrical negotiations in the post-Cotonou process have not been overlooked: for instance, the 2017 ACP position paper indicated that 'The challenge for the ACP Group would be to ensure that there is not simply an imposition by the EU of its vision'⁵⁰, whereas the 2018 ACP negotiating mandate cautioned against 'the institutional asymmetry between the ACP Group and the EU in order to ensure appropriate levels of representation and authority'.⁵¹

Within AU circles, the EU-ACP partnership has been perceived as mainly an aid-delivery mechanism with no political traction. By contrast, the AU is deemed not only to have more political clout and legitimacy, but also to provide a better structure to have Africa's voice heard and respected, 'to compel Europe to fulfil its obligations and to steer the dialogue with

Europe in Africa's favour'.⁵² This standpoint is certainly the consequence of the various proposals launched by the AU since the mid-2010s, notably to reform the institutional architecture with the Kagame report, to ensure financial stability based on a proposal of Donald Kaberuka and, mostly important, to achieve stability and prosperity following the adoption of *Agenda 2063* and other key initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area.

The fourth clash is linked to the role of the ACP Group and the AU in the international arena. The ambition of the ACP Group, particularly in the early phases of the process, was that of eventually becoming the leading global actor operating on behalf of the developing world, especially in light of the decreasing relevance of the G77; there was 'a clear-cut imperative for the ACP Group to make the transition from its role of being mainly an interest aggregating body – primarily in regard to relations with the European Union – to one of active global leadership and engagement on the many issues that face the developing countries of Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific at the regional and global levels', as the 2017 ACP position paper put it.⁵³ Eventually, these ambitions were narrowed down and the official discourse started focusing mostly on the ACP Group's partnership with the EU, particularly the benefits of joining forces in the international arena at a time in which multilateralism has been under attack.

Within AU circles, naturally, only the AU is deemed legitimate to conclude an agreement 'based on values, interests and aspirations that unite us and actively participate together in global discussions'.⁵⁴ In this regard, the change of name from EU-Africa Summit to EU-AU Summit at the November 2017 meeting of the heads of state and government of the two continents is noteworthy: in fact, it reflects 'the increasing recognition of the AU as an international actor that is becoming difficult to circumvent when engaging Africa'.⁵⁵ As for the aspiration of the ACP Group to be a global actor, the prevailing line within the AU is that 'the ACP Group can in no way represent a relevant policy framework for addressing global and regional governance, peace and security, and migration issues'.⁵⁶

Clashing institutional interests

The ACP negotiating mandate and the AU's African common position were significantly affected by the role that different actors wished to play in the negotiation and, eventually, implementation of a future agreement with the EU. On the one hand, the ACP Group

(specifically the ACP Secretariat and in part the Committee of Ambassadors) has claimed that it is the only actor legally entitled to engage with the EU. On the other hand, the AU (particularly the AUC and in part the PRC) has seen itself as the sole legitimate actor capable of representing Africa as a continent.

As for the ACP Group, the Committee of Ambassadors has performed two main tasks: assisting the ACP Council of Ministers in its functions and monitoring the implementation of the EU-ACP Agreement. More recently, however, it has gained prominence, taking almost all decisions before being formally adopted by the ACP Council of Ministers – though it should be noted that only a relatively small group of ambassadors is active. Meeting on a weekly basis, it takes decisions by consensus, which significantly constrains its ability to be an effective and goal-oriented actor; moreover, it often reaches lowest common denominator outcomes as most ambassadors tend to protect the interests of their home countries.⁵⁷

The ACP Secretariat is tasked to serve the organs of the ACP Group, but more recently it has acquired new functions linked to the direct management of large amounts of intra-ACP resources, which has attracted criticism for its excessive dependence on EU institutions.⁵⁸ It is headed by a secretary general (SG), elected according to a principle of rotation among the six ACP regions. Historically, the position of the SG in the ACP governance structure has been marginal, so much so that Obadiah Mailafia, head of cabinet under SG Mohamed Ibn Chambas (2010-12), has claimed that 'the status of the Secretary-General is, in truth, more that of Secretary than General'.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, some SGs, in particular Patrick Gomes (2015-2020), have been able 'to carve out a space for autonomous action, partly by using their privileged access to information, networks and resources.'⁶⁰

Within the AU, the Permanent Representatives Committee, which is composed of ambassadors representing their country of origin, plays a crucial role in the preparation and implementation of the decisions of the Executive Council and participates in the implementation of the programme of activities of the AU. Its role and performance have been subject to criticism, owing in part to human resources challenges (ie, scarce staff specialisation, delayed circulation of documents), lack of transparency and ineffective use of funds, and excessive interference in AUC affairs.⁶¹ The PRC was criticised in the Kagame report for taking 'an unwarranted role in the decision-making process', delaying decisions agreed upon by the AU Assembly or even disregarding them and interfering too much in the running of the AUC.⁶² Some analysts have noted that most African ambassadors to the AU behave 'like overbearing potentates in their dealing with the AU once they are in Addis

Ababa, simply because their national governments do not exercise sufficient day-to-day administrative oversights as they should'.⁶³

The AU Commission, appointed by the AU Assembly, acts as the custodian of the AU's Constitutive Act, is tasked with the day-to-day management of the AU, and implements the decisions taken by other organs of the AU. Its role and performance, like in the case of the PRC, have created divisions. Some have accused it of organisational inefficiency and failing to provide strategic direction to the AU. The reluctance of AU member states to further empower it ultimately means that they still see it as no more than a facilitator of cooperation – in this regard, the deliberation of the 2012 AU Summit to reverse its decision of 2009 to transform the AU Commission into the AU Authority was a setback to any aspiration of supranationalism.⁶⁴ Others have argued that the AUC has increasingly ensured that Africa's voice gains space in international debates and that Africa's common positions are articulated and given space in international contexts.⁶⁵

In the process that led to the adoption of the ACP negotiating mandate, the CoA and the SG formed a common front in promoting and protecting the ACP Group from external threats – with few exceptions within the group of African ambassadors.⁶⁶ The CoA prepared two substantial reports, the first in 2014 and the second in 2017, which to a large extent formed the basis for the ACP negotiating mandate: these reports, as to be expected, called for a significant increase in the roles of the CoA and the ACP Secretariat, in terms of both competences and resources. The ACP Secretariat, especially SG Gomes, conducted various outreach missions to publicise the 'common position that the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, as a unified entity, shall engage the European Union Member States and the European Commission in a single undertaking' for a successor to the Cotonou Agreement, and that no separate negotiation processes should be foreseen.⁶⁷

On the preparation of the AU decision, the AUC and the PRC cooperated more than was expected, considering their previous frictions and allegations of undue interference. In a speech made before the PRC when he presented the African common position in March 2018, Moussa Faki Mahamat praised the 'indispensable role of the PRC' and referred to the benefits of the interface between the AUC and the AU member states: 'It is this constant back and forth movement between the PRC, the Member States and the Commission that contributes to building a shared perception and understanding of geopolitical and economic issues by these three main actors at the service of one and the same cause: the emergence of Africa and the affirmation of its geopolitical personality'.⁶⁸ Evidently, the AUC and the PRC sought to use

the post-Cotonou process to regain legitimacy in the AU system of governance, defend their territory from the proposal to subsume the JAES into a future EU-ACP Agreement, and gain more power by playing a more prominent role in the management of any future EU-Africa Partnership, whatever form that would take. Their view is that, since all African countries that are party to the EU-ACP Agreement are also members of the AU, then negotiators speaking on behalf of Africa should receive the mandate from the governing bodies of the AU, as the ACP Group is not accountable to any of the AU's organs.⁶⁹ The caustic conclusion reached by René N'Guettia Kouassi, AUC Director of Economic Affairs, therefore is not surprising: 'there is every reason to believe that the debate on the subject is being "held hostage" in Brussels while the AU institutions, including the PRC and the AU Commission in particular are excluded from the negotiations'.⁷⁰

Conclusion

This article has sought to deliver on two key goals. First, it has traced the formation of Africa's position in view of the negotiations for a successor to the Cotonou Agreement set to expire in February 2020. On the one hand, African ambassadors sitting on the ACP Committee of Ambassadors and African ministers sitting on the ACP Council of Ministers contributed to the ACP negotiating mandate adopted in Lomé in May 2018. On the other hand, African ambassadors sitting on the AU's Permanent Representatives Committee and African ministers sitting on the AU Executive Council contributed to the African common position adopted by the AU in Kigali in March 2018. Interestingly, the ACP negotiating mandate and the AU's African common position are at odds, not so much in terms of the objectives to pursue, but essentially on who would best be able to represent the collective interest of African states vis-à-vis the EU. The former called for a stronger role for the ACP Group and a renewal of the EU-ACP Agreement, using mostly legal arguments – the 1975 Georgetown Agreement entrusted the ACP Group exclusively to manage the EU-ACP Agreement. The latter, using political arguments, sees the African Union as the only legitimate actor to interact with the EU on behalf of Africa and calls for the adoption of a new cooperation agreement, which respects African unity.

Second, this article has provided some explanations for the failure of the ACP Group in Brussels and the AU in Addis Ababa to achieve a consolidated position and for sending confusing messages that could ultimately weaken the position of Africa in the negotiations with the European Union. While it may be expected that the ACP Secretariat on the one hand

and the AU Commission on the other hand would seek to promote their (bureaucratic) interests, less understandable is the fact that ambassadors of the same African countries – sitting on the CoA in Brussels or the PRC in Addis Ababa – support processes leading to alternative outcomes. Clearly, coordination must not have worked well in national capitals, if ministerial representatives of African governments meeting in the ACP context (in most cases finance ministers) and ministerial representatives of the same governments meeting in the AU context (generally foreign affairs ministers) also agreed upon two decisions that were difficult to reconcile. These findings pave the way for further research on Africa's international relations, certainly on Africa's collective agency vis-à-vis other actors, but also on the formation of foreign policy preferences of single African states.

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¹ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *ACP Negotiating Mandate for a Post-Cotonou Partnership Agreement with the European Union*, ACP/00/011/18 Final, 107th Session of the ACP Council of Ministers, Lomé, 30 May 2018.

² AU (African Union), *Decision on the African Common Position for Negotiations for a New Cooperation Agreement with the European Union*, Decisions of the Eighteenth Extraordinary Session of the Executive Council, Ext/EX.CL/Dec.1 & 2(XVIII), Kigali, 19 March 2018.

³ In June 2016, South Africa signed the EU-SADC EPA together with 5 other members of the Southern African Development Community (Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, and Swaziland). Once ratified, this Economic Partnership Agreement is set to replace the TDCA.

⁴ For overviews of EU-Africa relations, see amongst others: Adebajo A & K Whiteman (eds), *The EU and Africa: From Eurafrique to Afro-Europa*. London: Hurst and Company, 2012; Carbone M (ed), *The European Union in Africa: Incoherent Policies, Asymmetrical Partnership, Declining Relevance?* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013; Mangala J (ed), *Africa and the European Union: A Strategic Partnership*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

⁵ This partition is also in contrast with aid programming at regional level, which foresees three regional indicative programmes: West Africa, Central Africa and 'Eastern African and Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO).

⁶ Pirozzi N & A Litsegård, 'The EU and Africa: Regionalism and Interregionalism Beyond Institutions', in Mattheis F & A Litsegård (eds), *Interregionalism across the Atlantic Space*. Heidelberg: Springer, 2018, p. 75-93.

⁷ On the Cotonou Agreement, see amongst others: Carbone M, 'Rethinking ACP-EU Relations After Cotonou: Tensions, Contradictions, Prospects', *Journal of International Development*, 25.5, 2013, pp. 742-756; Bossuyt J, N Keizer, A Medinilla, & M De Tollenaere, *The future of ACP-EU relations: A political economy analysis*

(Policy and Management Report 21). Maastricht: ECDPM, 2016; Montoute A & K Virk (eds) *The ACP Group and the EU Development Partnership: Beyond the North-South Debate*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

⁸ This process included a series of roundtables with experts, which formed the basis for a consultation paper launched in 2015, followed by a public consultation, exchanges with EU delegations and the European Parliament, and a general evaluation of the Cotonou Agreement. These different streams were taken into account in the impact assessment, which evaluated different scenarios and reached the conclusion that the EU's objectives would be best pursued through an agreement consisting of a general part applicable to all ACP countries and three strong regional partnerships. The building blocks of this 'preferred option' were spelt out in a communication adopted in November 2016. Carbone M, 'Purposefully aggregating triggering unintended consequences: the European Commission and the uncertain future of the EU-ACP partnership', *The International Spectator*, 54.1, 2019.

⁹ European Commission, *Recommendation for a Council Decision authorising the opening of negotiations on a Partnership Agreement between the European Union and countries of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States*, COM(2017) 763 final, Strasbourg, 12 December 2017.

¹⁰ *Agenda 2063* is the framework adopted in 2013 set to guide the socio-economic transformation of the African continent over the next 50 years. It builds on, and seeks to accelerate the implementation of past and existing continental initiatives for growth and sustainable development. See <https://au.int/agenda2063>

¹¹ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *Transforming the ACP Group of States into an Effective Global Player*, Final Report of the Ambassadorial Working Group on Future Perspectives of the ACP Group of States, ACP/27/022/14 Rev. 4, Brussels, 2 December 2014.

¹² For a review of the early phases of these discussions, see Gomes P, 'The ACP Ambassadorial Working Group on Future Perspectives of the ACP Group', in Montoute A & K Virk (eds) *The ACP Group and the EU Development Partnership: Beyond the North-South Debate*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 291-315.

¹³ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *ACP: A New Vision for Our Future*, Report by the Eminent Persons Group, March 2016.

¹⁴ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *Sipopo Declaration – The Future of the ACP Group in Changing World: Challenges and Opportunities*, 7th Summit of ACP Heads of State and Government, ACP/28/065/12 [Final], Sipopo, Equatorial Guinea, 14 December 2012.

¹⁵ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *Waigani Communiqué on the Future Perspectives of the ACP Group of States*, 8th Summit of ACP Heads of State and Government, ACP/28/046 Final, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, 31 May-1 June 2016.

¹⁶ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), Decisions and Resolutions, 104th Session of the ACP Council of Ministers, Brussels, 29-30 November 2016.

¹⁷ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *Towards the ACP we want*, ACP/1/1/11(Vol.1) 17 Rev.3, Brussels, 1 May 2017.

¹⁸ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), Decisions, Resolutions and Declaration, 105th Session of the ACP Council of Ministers, Brussels, 3-4 May 2017.

¹⁹ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), Decisions, Resolutions and Declaration, 106th Session of the ACP Council of Ministers, Brussels, 5-6 December 2017.

²⁰ Agence Europe, 'ACP countries adopt their negotiation mandate for post-Cotonou, Europeans continue their consultations', *Europe Daily Bulletin* No. 12030, 30 May 2018.

²¹ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *ACP Negotiating Mandate for a Post-Cotonou Partnership Agreement with the European Union*, 107th Session of the ACP Council of Ministers, Lomé, 30 May 2018.

²² AUC (African Union Commission) Economic Affairs Department, 'The future of ACP-EU relations: What role for the African Union?', *The Bulletin of the Fridays of the Commission*, 7, December 2015.

²³ AU (African Union), *Africa's Strategic Partnerships*, Decisions of the Thirtieth Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, EX.CL/Dec.939-964(XXX), Addis Ababa, 25-27 January 2017.

²⁴ AU (African Union), *Multilateral Cooperation*, Decisions, Declarations & Resolutions of the Thirty-First Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, EX.CL/ Dec.965-985(XXXI), Addis Ababa, 27 June-1 July 2017.

- ²⁵ European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *A renewed partnership with the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific*, JOIN(2016) 52 final, Strasbourg, 22 November 2016. Countries in North Africa were initially wary of the intentions of the European Union, seeing the risk of potential reduction of resources from the EU. One diplomat was reported saying: 'We don't think the continent should be treated as one. There are oceans between member states and regions'. International Crisis Group, 'Time to Reset African Union-European Union Relations'. *Africa Report* N° 265, Brussels, 17 October 2017, p. 10.
- ²⁶ Keijzer N & A Medinilla, 'Can the EU prioritise both the African Union and the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Group?', *European Think Tanks Group*, November 2017, p. 2.
- ²⁷ Laporte G, 'EU-Africa: breaking the silence and the vested interests', *ECDPM Great Insights*, Maastricht: ECDPM, November/December 2017, p. 15.
- ²⁸ African Union, *Multilateral Cooperation*, Decisions of the Thirty-Second Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, EX.CL/ Dec.986-1007(XXXII), Addis Ababa, 25-26 January 2018. The AU Taskforce held its first session only on 9 March 2018 and considered two documents, one prepared by the AU Commission and the other developed jointly by the Group of African Ambassadors in Brussels and the AU Permanent Representation to the EU. The two documents questioned the EU-ACP framework, though the one presented by the AUC was far more critical (Interviews with nine African ambassadors, May 2018).
- ²⁹ AU (African Union), *Decision on the African Common Position for Negotiations for a New Cooperation Agreement with the European Union*, Decisions of the Eighteenth Extraordinary Session of the Executive Council, Ext/EX.CL/Dec.1 & 2(XVIII), Kigali, 19 March 2018.
- ³⁰ AU (African Union), *Draft Statement by H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission*, Extraordinary Session of the AU Assembly, Meeting of the Permanent Representatives' Committee, Kigali, 17 March 2018, at pp. 5-6.
- ³¹ AU (African Union), *The African Union Executive Council adopts the African Common Position for Negotiations of a new cooperation agreement with the European Union*, Directorate of Information and Communication, 27 March 2018.
- ³² Interviews with nine African ambassadors, March-May 2018.
- ³³ This position was further reiterated in the context of the annual College-to-College meeting between the AU Commission and the EU Commission. Moussa Faki Mahamat restated that the AU wished to have a continent-to-continent relationship and indicated that the common African position would be presented in Lomé. See Fox B, 'We want separate Africa relations with EU, says AU chief', *Euractiv*, 24 May 2018; Agence Europe, 'ACP Group says it is determined to negotiate post-Cotonou agreement with EU as a single bloc', *Europe Daily Bulletin* No. 12026, 25 May 2018.
- ³⁴ Note that the author of this article was invited by the ACP Group to present his views on the evolution of the EU-ACP partnership agreement in the context of the ACP Council of Minister held in Lomé at the end of May 2018.
- ³⁵ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *Sipopo Declaration – The Future of the ACP Group in Changing World: Challenges and Opportunities*, 7th Summit of ACP Heads of State and Government. ACP/28/065/12 [Final], Sipopo, Equatorial Guinea, 14 December 2012, p. 13.
- ³⁶ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *Waigani Communiqué on the Future Perspectives of the ACP Group of States*, 8th Summit of ACP Heads of State and Government, ACP/28/046 Final, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, 31 May-1 June 2016.
- ³⁷ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *Towards the ACP we want*, ACP/1/1/11(Vol.1) 17 Rev. 3, Brussels 1 May 2017.
- ³⁸ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *ACP Negotiating Mandate for a Post-Cotonou Partnership Agreement with the European Union*, ACP/00/011/18 Final, 107th Session of the ACP Council of Ministers, Lomé, 30 May 2018.
- ³⁹ AUC 2015 AUC (African Union Commission) 'Economic Affairs Department: Conclusions and recommendations drawn from the Fridays of the Commission', *The Bulletin of the Fridays of the Commission*, 7, December 2015, p. 11.

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- ⁴⁰ N'Guettia Kouassi R, 'Introduction: should we bury the ACP-EU framework after 2020', *The Bulletin of the Fridays of the Commission*, 7, December 2015, p. 7.
- ⁴¹ Agence Europe, 'Commission proposed a negotiating mandate for an updated post-2020 ACP-EU partnership', *Europe Daily Bulletin* No. 11924, 12 December 2017.
- ⁴² Keizer N and M Negre, 'Outsourcing a partnership? Assessing ACP-EU cooperation under the Cotonou Partnership Agreement', *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 21.2, pp. 279-296.
- ⁴³ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *Towards the ACP we want*, ACP/1/1/11(Vol.1) 17 Rev.3, Brussels 1 May 2017, p. 28.
- ⁴⁴ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *ACP Negotiating Mandate for a Post-Cotonou Partnership Agreement with the European Union*, 107th Session of the ACP Council of Ministers, Lomé, 30 May 2018.
- ⁴⁵ Interviews with nine African ambassadors, March-May 2018.
- ⁴⁶ Interview with African ambassador (citing from the March 2018 African common position adopted in Kigali), May 2018.
- ⁴⁷ AUC (African Union Commission) 'Economic Affairs Department: Conclusions and recommendations drawn from the Fridays of the Commission', *The Bulletin of the Fridays of the Commission*, 7, December 2015, p. 13.
- ⁴⁸ Interview with AUC senior policy maker, May 2018.
- ⁴⁹ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *Towards the ACP we want*, ACP/1/1/11(Vol.1) 17 Rev.3, Brussels 1 May 2017, p. 3.
- ⁵⁰ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *Towards the ACP we want*, ACP/1/1/11(Vol.1) 17 Rev.3, Brussels 1 May 2017, p. 23.
- ⁵¹ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *ACP Negotiating Mandate for a Post-Cotonou Partnership Agreement with the European Union*, 107th Session of the ACP Council of Ministers, Lomé, 30 May 2018.
- ⁵² N'Guettia Kouassi R, 'Ensuring a more effective and beneficial cooperation', *ECDPM Great Insights*, November/December 2017, pp. 4-9, at p. 8.
- ⁵³ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *Towards the ACP we want*, ACP/1/1/11(Vol.1) 17 Rev.3, Brussels 1 May 2017, p. 27.
- ⁵⁴ AU (African Union), *The African Union Executive Council adopts the African Common Position for Negotiations of a new cooperation agreement with the European Union*, Directorate of Information and Communication, 27 March 2018.
- ⁵⁵ Mattheis F & J Kotsopoulos, 'The EU-Africa summit is now the AU-EU summit. Why the upgrade matters', *The Conversation*, 4 December 2017.
- ⁵⁶ AU (African Union), *The African Union Executive Council adopts the African Common Position for Negotiations of a new cooperation agreement with the European Union*, Directorate of Information and Communication, 27 March 2018.
- ⁵⁷ Keijzer N, 'Feigned ambition. Analysing the emergence, evolution and performance of the ACP Group of States', *Third World Thematics*, 1.4, 2016, pp. 508-525.
- ⁵⁸ With the Cotonou Agreement, the ACP Secretariat was designated as Regional Authorising Officer for intra-ACP cooperation, thus managing between 10% and 20% of the 9th, 10th and 11th EDF. The running costs of the Secretariat are co-financed by the EU (up to 50%), though a significant number of ACP states have consistently failed to pay their dues.
- ⁵⁹ Mailafia O, 'Europe Seen from Africa', in Schepers S & A Kakabadse (eds) *Rethinking the Future of Europe: A Challenge of Governance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 236.
- ⁶⁰ Bossuyt J, N Keijzer, A Medinilla, & M De Tollenaere, *The future of ACP-EU relations: A political economy analysis* (Policy and Management Report 21). Maastricht: ECDPM, 2016, p. 27.
- ⁶¹ Lisakafu J, 'Exploring the role and place of the Permanent Representative Committee within the African Union', *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 23.2, 2016, pp. 225-241.

⁶² Kagame P, *The Imperative to Strengthen Our Union*, Report on the Proposed Recommendations for the Institutional Reform of the African Union, 29 January 2017, p. 10.

⁶³ Ukeje C & R Ako, 'Reforming the AU's Permanent Representatives Committee', in Ndiaye F (ed), *A Wind of Change? The Institutional Reform of the African Union and Africa's Security Provision*, Addis Ababa: 2018 Tana Papers, pp. 38-49, at p. 43.

⁶⁴ Yihdego Z, 'The African Union: Founding Principles, Frameworks and Prospects', *European Law Journal*, 17.5, 2011, pp. 568-594; Nagar D & F Nganje, *The African Union: Regional and Global Challenges, Policy Research Seminar Report*. Cape Town: Centre for Conflict Resolution, August 2016; Rukato H, 'The African Union: Regional and Global Challenges', in Karbo T & T Murithi (eds) *The African Union: Autocracy, Diplomacy and Peacebuilding in Africa*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2017; Fagbayibo B, 'From OAU to AU: Rethinking Supranational Governance in Africa', in Oloruntoba SO & T Falola (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of African Politics, Governance and Development*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 771-782.

⁶⁵ Rukato H, 'The African Union: Regional and Global Challenges', in Karbo T & T Murithi (eds) *The African Union: Autocracy, Diplomacy and Peacebuilding in Africa*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2017.

⁶⁶ Caribbean and Pacific Islands ministers had already adopted official positions, supporting the renewal of the partnership between the ACP and the EU.

⁶⁷ ACP Group (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States), *ACP Negotiating Mandate for a Post-Cotonou Partnership Agreement with the European Union*, ACP/00/011/18 Final, 107th Session of the ACP Council of Ministers, Lomé, 30 May 2018, p. 2.

⁶⁸ AU (African Union), *Statement by H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat Chairperson of the African Union Commission at the Meeting of the Permanent Representatives' Committee at the Extraordinary Session of the AU Assembly on the Continental Free Trade Area*, Kigali, Rwanda, 17 March 2018.

⁶⁹ Interview with African ambassador (citing from the March 2018 African common position adopted in Kigali), and with two AUC senior policy makers, May 2018.

⁷⁰ N'Guettia Kouassi R, 'Ensuring a more effective and beneficial cooperation', *ECDPM Great Insights*, November/December 2017, pp. 4-9, at p. 9. Along similar lines, Keijzer and Negre on the basis of a series of interviews both in Brussels and in national capitals maintain that there is a sort of 'social disconnect' between stakeholders in African countries, who do not see a real added value in the continuation of the EU-ACP Agreement, and African ambassadors in Brussels, who seem in support for revising and upgrading the Agreement: the conclusion, in their view, is that African states appear to have largely outsourced their bilateral relations with the EU to a group of diplomats in Brussels. Keizer N and M Negre, 'Outsourcing a partnership? Assessing ACP-EU cooperation under the Cotonou Partnership Agreement', *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 21.2, 2014, pp. 279-296.